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KGB Official Says He Didn't Defect, Accuses U.S. Agents of Kidnapping Him

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WASHINGTON — Vitaly Yurchenko, prized by the U.S. as one of the highest-ranking KGB officials ever to defect, denied that he had defected and insisted he had been kidnapped by U.S. agents.

He said he would return to the Soviet Union.

Mr. Yurchenko, who reportedly gave the Central Intelligence Agency valuable new information on KGB spy operations throughout the world, was the star of an unprecedented press conference at the Soviet Embassy here yesterday. Contending that he had escaped from the CIA, he said he didn't remember giving the CIA any secret information.

Mr. Yurchenko said he was seized and drugged by "some unknown persons" while visiting Rome in August and was taken to the U.S. unconscious. He told a hastily assembled pool of U.S. and Soviet reporters that for three months he was interrogated and tortured at a CIA facility near Fredricksburg, Va.

Likely Embarrassment to U.S.

The Yurchenko incident is likely to be a major embarrassment to the U.S., just a few weeks before the summit between President Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Mr. Yurchenko's apparent defection to the West in August was viewed as a big embarrassment to the Soviets.

U.S. officials, shocked by Mr. Yurchenko's sudden appearance on television last night, scrambled to rebut his accusations, asserting that he came to the U.S. voluntarily and that he had disappeared while supposedly going to dinner Saturday.

The State Department suggested that Mr. Yurchenko somehow may have been captured and coerced by Soviet agents. John Whitehead, acting secretary of state, warned Soviet embassy officials that "before we allow Yurchenko to leave this country, we will insist on a meeting with him in an environment free of Soviet coercion to satisfy ourselves about his real intentions."

It was the third time in one week that an apparent Russian defector had returned to Soviet custody. Mr. Yurchenko's announcement came on the heels of the return of a Soviet seaman who jumped ship in Louisiana and the return of a Soviet enlisted man who had sought sanctuary in the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.

'My Torturers'

The Soviets staged Mr. Yurchenko's mysterious reappearance for maximum propaganda effect. Appearing excited and eager to tell his story, Mr. Yurchenko repeatedly said his human rights had been violated at the hands of people he described as "my torturers."

Sen. David Durenberger (R., Minn.), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said CIA Director William J. Casey told him that Mr. Yurchenko hadn't shown up for a scheduled dinner Saturday night with CIA agents. Sometime after that, Mr. Yurchenko called the CIA and told agency officials that they would see him next on television.

Both Sen. Durenberger and the vice chairman of the committee, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.), said Mr. Yurchenko may have been fooling the U.S. all along as a double agent. "We got some good stuff," Mr. Durenberger said, "but if in fact it turned out he was a double defector, you have egg on your face."

Mr. Yurchenko said that at one point in his interrogation he was brought to CIA headquarters at Langley, Va., for a dinner with Mr. Casey, but added that he didn't remember much about it because he had been drugged beforehand. He said that last week he was brought to a Washington suburb after refusing to sign a CIA contract offering him a \$1 million "down payment" and \$180,000 annual salary for life for cooperating with the U.S.

"I'm very proud I managed to escape... but I don't tell the details," Mr. Yurchenko said.

The State Department said Mr. Yurchenko was deputy chief of the North American department of the KGB's first chief directorate, a position that made him responsible for directing Soviet intelligence operations in the U.S. and Canada. Previously he had served as top security officer here in the Soviet Embassy from 1975 to 1980.

U.S. officials said Mr. Yurchenko revealed a wealth of Soviet spy information, including information on two cases that the CIA made public. One of them involved the alleged spying of a former CIA trainee, Edward Howard, whom Mr. Yurchenko reportedly identified as having given the Soviets sensitive information about U.S. operatives in the Soviet Union. Mr. Howard mysteriously left his home in New Mexico last month shortly before FBI agents, act-

ing on information from Mr. Yurchenko, came to arrest him.

Late last month, the CIA disclosed that Mr. Yurchenko also had provided an answer to the disappearance of Nicholas G. Shadrin, a U.S. double agent who was last seen Dec. 20, 1975, preparing for a meeting with KGB agents in Vienna. In the Yurchenko version of the story leaked to the press by the CIA, Mr. Shadrin was given a fatal overdose of chloroform while KGB agents attempted to smuggle him out of Austria. Mr. Yurchenko yesterday accused the CIA of making the story up.

The State Department called Mr. Yurchenko's accusations "completely false and without any foundation." The department said the Soviet had defected "of his own volition to the American embassy in Rome" and had signed a note Aug. 1 requesting asylum in the U.S.

The State Department said, "Since his arrival in the U.S. on Aug. 2, Mr. Yurchenko has willingly cooperated with both the Central Intelligence Agency and the FBI in providing information about Soviet intelligence activities throughout the world and the organization of the KGB. At no time was Mr. Yurchenko held or coerced by improper, illegal, or unethical means."

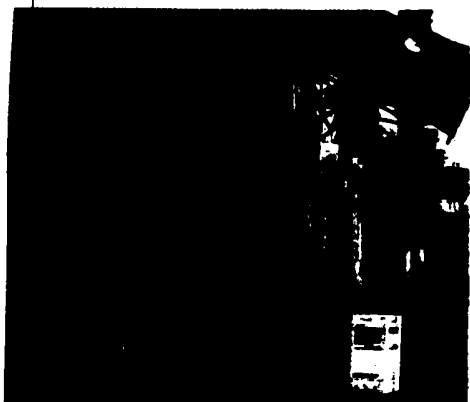
glee at revealing its exact location and details. Only on Nov. 2, when his CIA "torturers" let down their guard, so he said, was he able to escape.

Yurchenko described how CIA officials tried to buy his cooperation by offering him a \$1 million payment plus \$62,500 a year for life. The agency, he said, was even willing to throw in the safe house's furniture, worth about \$48,000. He met with Casey over dinner at the CIA's Langley, Va., headquarters, but claimed he did not recall the conversation very well because he had been drugged before the meal by agents eager to make Casey think he was a willing defector.

Yurchenko denied he had willingly given any Soviet secrets to the CIA, but added that he did not know what he had said while drugged. "Please ask CIA officials what kind of secret information I gave them," Yurchenko said in English. "It would be very interesting for me to know too, because I don't know." When questioned about whether he was in the KGB, Yurchenko said that "I'm not going to make any comments about spying business."

Though Yurchenko gave a confident performance, many of his answers were vague or contradictory. He refused to explain how he had escaped from the CIA. He said he had been held in isolation, but when one reporter identified himself, Yurchenko mentioned he had received a letter from him during his alleged captivity. Prompted by questions from two Soviet correspondents, Yurchenko compared his kidnapping to "state-sponsored terrorism" and accused the U.S. of "hypocrisy" for preaching about human rights yet violating his. As farfetched as his tale was, it provides the Soviets with a handy riposte at home and abroad to undercut Reagan when he brings up Soviet human rights violations at the Geneva summit. "What lawlessness!" commented *Pravda* after running Yurchenko's account. "And it takes place in a country whose leaders trumpet all over the world about 'democracy' and 'liberties,' who seek to teach everybody how one should observe human rights."

Washington officials, agog over what they had just seen on their TV sets, immediately denied Yurchenko's allegations.



The Last Supper: Georgetown bistro



The Last Wave: Yurchenko bids farewell as he boards an Aeroflot jet at Dulles Airport

State Department Spokesman Charles Redman called the charges "completely false and without any foundation." State Department officials informed the Soviets they would not allow Yurchenko to leave the U.S. until he had satisfied them he was going voluntarily. On Tuesday evening he was driven to the State Department for a meeting with senior officials and a psychiatrist. After the 30-minute visit, U.S. officials concluded that Yurchenko indeed wished to leave. As he emerged from the building, he clasped his hands above his head and shouted to reporters, "Yes, home!"

According to his CIA biography, released at the end of last week, Yurchenko, 49, is indeed a master spy. He served as a submarine navigation officer for a year before joining the KGB in 1960. After several assignments in naval counterintelligence and security, he became in 1972 deputy chief of the third department of the KGB's Third Chief Directorate, a daunting mouthful that essentially meant Yurchenko helped recruit and run foreign agents. Yurchenko came to Washington in 1975, charged with overseeing

security arrangements for the embassy. In 1980 Yurchenko returned to Moscow, where he became head of the section responsible for, among other things, ferreting out double agents and leaks within the KGB. In April of this year Yurchenko was named deputy chief of intelligence operations in the U.S. and Canada, a position that theoretically would allow him to know the identity of every Soviet agent in those countries. Reports that Yurchenko was the No. 5 man in the KGB are overblown, according to an intelligence source, but he "was a very senior person who had a high-ranking position within the organization."

In late July Yurchenko arrived in Rome from Moscow and was driven to Villa Abamelek, the Soviet embassy compound on the city's outskirts. On the morning of July 28, according to original accounts, Yurchenko told his guards he wanted to go by himself to the Vatican museums, less than a mile away. He never returned. Though stories have circulated about how Yurchenko disappeared, including an account carried this month by *Actuel*, a French magazine, which claims

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that Yurchenko met his CIA contact in the Sistine Chapel. U.S. officials refuse to reveal details. The State Department, however, reiterated last week that Yurchenko requested political asylum at the U.S. embassy on Aug. 1.

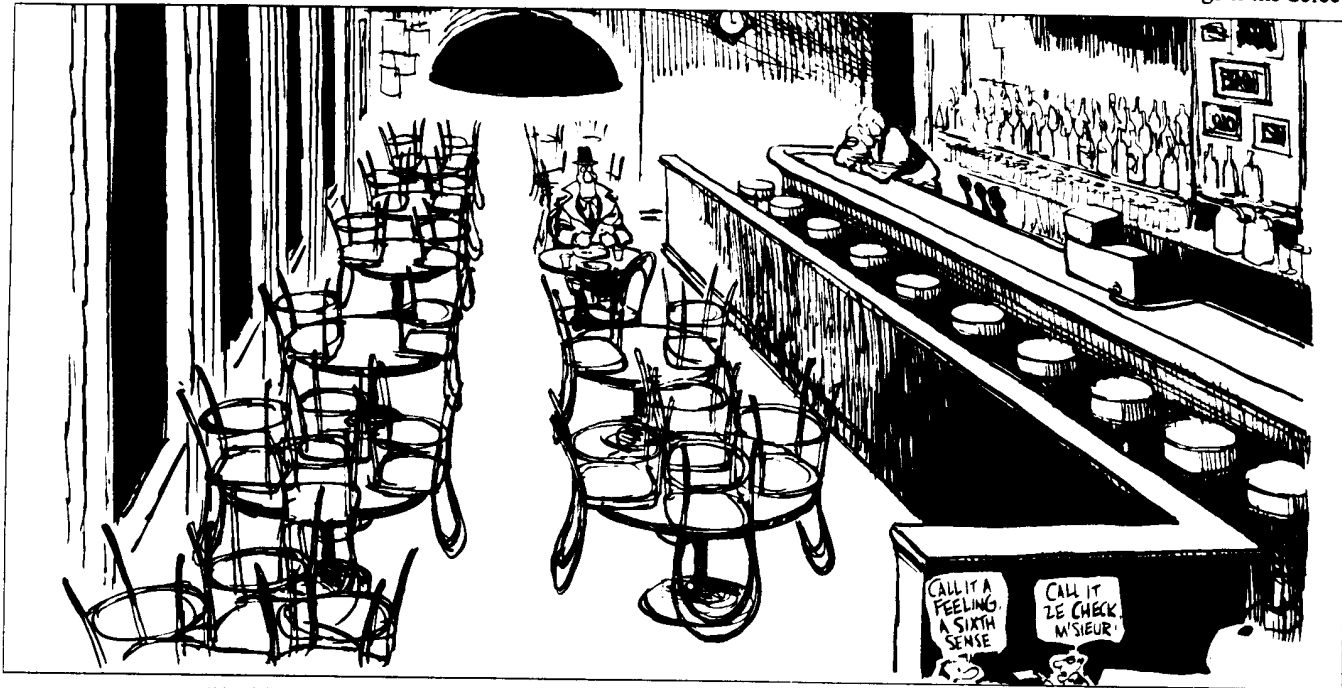
Yurchenko's defection was not publicly acknowledged by Administration officials until late September. Privately, U.S. officials credited him with supplying information about the "spy dust" that Soviet secret police supposedly used to track Americans in Moscow. Yurchenko blew the whistle on Edward Lee Howard, the former CIA trainee who allegedly gave Moscow information about a U.S. agent

ing sides long ago. During his Washington stay in the late 1970s, according to one high-level source, Yurchenko became friendly with the FBI agents whom he met in his job and began trading tidbits of information.

Yet depression is the constant enemy of any defector, and Soviets seem especially prone to what intelligence experts call "the postpartum blues." Yurchenko's case reminded many diplomats of Soviet Journalist Oleg Bitov, who returned to Moscow last year after defecting to Great Britain in 1983. Though Bitov offered a kidnap tale similar to Yurchenko's, British officials are convinced that both men

supposedly had wanted the news of his defection kept secret, and was quite upset that the stories about Howard and Shadrin had been leaked to the press.

Some in Washington feel that Yurchenko was a KGB plant all along, that his defection in Rome was just a ruse. They say it is nonsense to believe that he was a real defector who decided to go back and face likely death because of a change of heart. Given his apparent access to the names and details of KGB agents in the U.S. and other nations, a former senior CIA counterintelligence official argues, a flood of arrests and expulsions would have followed his debriefings if his defec-



"Suddenly, intuitively, the awful realization hit CIA agent Bumworthy—his dinner companion, the Russian defector, would not be coming back!"

in the Soviet Union. Howard, who had been fired by the agency in 1983, vanished two months ago in Santa Fe while under FBI surveillance; he is now believed to be in Moscow.* The CIA also leaked word that Yurchenko had solved the mystery of Nicholas Shadrin, a defector who, while working for the CIA, disappeared in Vienna in 1975. Yurchenko said that Shadrin had been kidnapped and killed by KGB agents.

The prevailing view within the CIA is that Yurchenko was a genuine defector who grew homesick. The CIA paints Yurchenko at the time of his defection as an unhappy man, disenchanted with the KGB, fed up with his wife of nearly 30 years and teenage son, and eager for a fresh start in the West. Indeed, Yurchenko may have contemplated switch-

ing sides long ago. "A feeling arises that ... 'Mother Russia beckons,' that the West, nice as it has been, is not 'me,'" explains a British intelligence officer.

Yurchenko also was the victim of a romance gone sour. According to intelligence experts, Yurchenko was deeply in love with the wife of a Soviet diplomat whom he had met while posted in Washington. After Yurchenko defected, the CIA arranged for him to visit the woman in Ottawa, where her husband is now assigned. Exactly what happened is not known, but in the end she rejected him. (In what appears to be only an eerie coincidence, the wife of a Soviet trade official committed suicide in Toronto last week by jumping from her 27th-floor apartment. Canadian and U.S. authorities claimed that the dead woman was not Yurchenko's lover.)

After the woman spurned Yurchenko, he became morose. He had trouble sleeping. A bit of a hypochondriac, Yurchenko insisted on drinking only boiled water. He

tion were legitimate. Instead, the skeptics point out, Yurchenko offered only meager pickings, a contention that Reagan seemed to support last week when he told reporters that Yurchenko had not provided "anything new or sensational."

Those who believe his defection was real counter by saying that Yurchenko may have been holding back information for his own reasons, parceling it out carefully as he watched how the CIA treated him. The official CIA line is that Yurchenko was in fact quite forthcoming and supplied details about the KGB network in the U.S. and abroad. As for Reagan's downplaying of Yurchenko's revelations, some espionage experts contend that it is the only sensible response for a President who wants to keep Moscow guessing how much the U.S. now knows about Soviet operations.

It is difficult to believe that the Soviets would risk using a KGB official as important as Yurchenko in a sting operation against the CIA. There is always the chance that the agent might defect for

TIME learned last week that Howard eluded the FBI with a crude ruse. One day Howard and his wife got into their car and drove off. At some point during the journey, his wife inflated a balloon dummy and placed it in her husband's seat while Howard slipped away. Howard's wife is now cooperating with the Government.

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good or be forced to reveal valuable information. "If you were chief of the KGB, would you pick an agent who knew all your agents and send him on a mission like this?" asks former CIA Director Richard Helms.

Even many who support the CIA's contention that it was not hoodwinked by a fake question the agency's treatment of Yurchenko. Though the CIA in the past has kept defectors virtually imprisoned (KGB Officer Yuri Nosenko, who defected in 1964, was held in a tiny prison cell for nearly four years while U.S. intelligence officials bickered over whether he was a Soviet plant), the policy today is to give them as much freedom as possible in order to reinforce their belief in the American system. Yet sometimes that approach is sloppily executed. Yurchenko, for example, allegedly was left pretty much alone on weekends, with only one junior officer as his companion. How Yurchenko, already feeling depressed, could be allowed to eat at a restaurant within walking distance of the Soviet residential compound also mystified CIA critics. "The mishandling is obvious," says Republican Senator Frank Murkowski. "If you catch a fish this big . . . you usually check your nets to see if there are holes in them."

Many CIA officials agree that Yurchenko's handlers failed to establish a strong bond with their client. Though few believe Yurchenko took away any U.S. secrets other than a firsthand account of how the CIA conducts debriefings, the epi-

sode is still deeply embarrassing to Casey, who acted as the defector's top case officer and wrote personal memos about him to Reagan. Though the CIA plans to complete an internal inquiry about what went wrong in about six weeks, there are no White House plans for a separate investigation. Casey, however, is certain to face tough grilling on the Hill, where the Senate Intelligence Committee plans to hold hearings.

Many are resigned to never knowing the whole story behind Yurchenko and how much he helped—or hurt—U.S. intelligence. As Republican Senator William Cohen put it last week, pondering the world of espionage is akin to stepping "into an infinite line of mirrors where it's impossible to detect reality from reflection." The world may never even learn the ultimate fate of Yurchenko, who is now probably undergoing another heavy bout of debriefing, this time, of course, by the KGB. "Yurchenko will go home to a hero's welcome, be put on the lecture circuit there, and then, when nobody's looking, be shot—if he's lucky," predicts a senior official of the U.S. intelligence community. That scenario assumes, of course, that Yurchenko is what he appears to be: a onetime defector who changed his mind. Yet sometimes, even in the land of mirrors, the most obvious image is the real one.

—By James Kelly.
Reported by David Halevy and Gregory H. Wierzynski/Washington